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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DUBLIN 001264

SIPDIS

EUR/PPD (ACERVETTI)  
EUR/UBI (NNOLAN)  
NEA/PPD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/27/2014

TAGS: PREL PTER PINR KPAO

SUBJECT: IRISH/IRAQI SHI'A MUSLIMS WELCOME AMBASSADOR TO  
IFTAR

REF: A. DUBLIN 1216

1B. DUBLIN 1161

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JAMES C. KENNY, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B), (D)

Summary

11. (C) Summary. On October 8, the Ambassador and two emboffs received a warm welcome at an Iftar celebration at the local Shi'a mosque in Dublin. Dr. Ali A. A. Al-Saleh, the Imam of the predominantly Iraqi Mosque, spoke out publicly in strong support of USG policy, stating that U.S. intervention in Iraq is changing the political landscape of the region. He criticized the governments of neighboring countries (except Iran), stating that corrupt regimes feel threatened by an increasingly democratic Iraq. He added that the world will see the determination of the Iraqi people in the upcoming constitutional referendum and the December 31 general election. The Irish Times (Dublin's newspaper of record) attended the event at the request of the mosque and reported favorably on comments made by the Ambassador and the mosque hosts. End Summary.

Warm welcome at the Mosque

12. (C) On October 8, the Ambassador, econoff, and poloff visited the Ahlul Bait Islamic Center (a predominantly Iraqi Shi'a mosque in Dublin) to participate in Iftar celebrations. The Imam Dr. Ali A. A. Al-Saleh (Irish, Iraqi, Saudi citizen) and prominent leaders of the Shi'a community invited embassy staff to attend the event as a follow-on to the previous week's meeting of Muslims at the embassy (ref A). The Imam and approximately 150 members of the Mosque warmly received the Ambassador. The Shi'a community present at the service are mostly Irish citizens but hail from Iraq, Lebanon, Iran and Gulf countries. Ethnic backgrounds included Arab, Kurd, Azeri and Turkomen. During the service, the Imam spoke out in strong support of USG actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, publicly echoing most of the sentiments expressed in ref A.

Building Democracies

13. (C) Al-Saleh told the Mosque audience, with press in attendance, that before U.S. intervention in Iraq, Muslims wondered if Islam was compatible with democracy. Now, though, Iraqis are saying that one cannot have Islam without democracy. The Irish Times reported the event in its October 10 edition and cited Al-Saleh's remarks on how U.S. involvement in Iraq is positively changing the political landscape of the Middle East. Khalid Ibrahim, an Iraqi Kurd human rights activist, was also quoted by the Irish Times as saying, "I believe that we are working together to build real democracies."

Domino Effect

14. (C) In side-bar conversations with the Ambassador, several members expressed strong concern regarding perceived Syrian, Jordanian and Saudi complicity with the terrorists in Iraq. Citing ties between Syrian and Iraqi Ba'athists, they highlighted reports of jihadists' easy access into Iraq through Syrian borders and alleged that Syrian border guards could be bribed for as little as ten USD. Members of the community expressed outrage that Muslims from countries as far off as Indonesia and the Philippines allegedly travel to Iraq to kill Shi'as. The group said that Muslim countries, notably Saudi Arabia, want Iraq to fail, because success in Iraq will create an impetus for change and will challenge the rule of all regional non-democratic governments. Notably absent from the conversation was criticism of Iran.

Constitution and U.S. Presidential Election

15. (C) Al-Saleh noted the timing of this event as key for two

reasons:

--In a week's time, he reminded the audience, Iraq is to return to the polls to vote on the constitution and then in December for the general election. Al-Saleh said that the Iraqis, especially the Shi'as, would once again prove to the world their desire for democracy. He said that since Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani approves of the constitution, the clerics will support it. He added that, on this and other issues such as women's rights, the key to success is convincing the clerics to forego tradition for the sake of progress.

--Al-Saleh said that this time last year, Iraqi Muslims spent Ramadan praying for the re-election of President Bush, commanding him as the candidate with the will to support Iraq's efforts towards democracy.

#### Real Sacrifice

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16. (C) Al-Saleh and others made a point that they have lost loved ones, but that the struggle for democracy in Iraq must continue. Two days previously, two of Al-Saleh's brothers-in-law were killed in a suicide attack in Hilla. The group remarked that Iraqi Shi'as will continue to support democracy and fight terrorism at all costs.

17. (U) Text of Irish Times October 10, 2005 article: US needs to listen to world's Muslims, says envoy at Shia event.  
By Deaglan de Breadun, Foreign Affairs Correspondent.

#### BEGIN TEXT

The United States needed to "listen and learn" from Muslims around the world, US ambassador James C. Kenny told members of Dublin's Shia Muslim community in a speech after a prayer ceremony in the Milltown mosque at the weekend, Deaglan de Breadun.

Several hundred Shia Muslims living in Ireland, along with some Sunnis, greeted the ambassador and his aides on their arrival. The ambassador attended prayers to mark the holy month of Ramadan and stayed for a meal afterwards. He invited his listeners, many of them of Iraqi origin, to attend a reception at his residence in the Phoenix Park in the near future.

In his speech, Mr Kenny said it was a great opportunity to listen and learn. A group from the Shia Muslim community had come to the US embassy in Ballsbridge for a meeting two weeks ago, "to start and build a dialogue between your community and ours".

"We think that's essential for our future, to go forward together. The Americans have to sit down and listen and learn and understand and at the same time you will hear our voices, you can hear what we're talking about and what we hope we can do for each other in the future. That's what we want to do."

Stressing that he had been "very, very impressed with the honest dialogue that we have had at the embassy", he said he would "love to be invited back in the near future". He brought special greetings from President Bush for Ramadan.

The ambassador told The Irish Times earlier that the meeting with the Shia Muslim group was "absolutely one of the best days we've ever had in an American embassy and particularly in Ireland".

"It is a day that we will remember and we're going to want to do more of them. It energised the people that were on our side of the table, it energised myself. I want to learn more and listen and I think America needs to do more of that, of listening and learning. And I want to bring that back to America."

Iraqi-born Imam Ali Al-Saleh, head of the Shia Muslim community in Ireland, said he had lost two brothers-in-law in an attack by suicide bombers on a mosque at Hilla, south of Baghdad, last week.

Dr Al-Saleh said the majority of people in Iraq and Afghanistan looked on the Americans as "our friends because they helped us in getting rid of the Taliban and getting rid of Saddam". He added: "They are really sacrificing a lot now to help us in resisting and stopping the terrorism which is going on in the Middle East and especially in Iraq. What is happening in Iraq now is a turning-point in our mentality." Khalid Ibrahim, an Iraqi human rights activist living in Dublin, said: "I believe we are working together to build real democracies."  
END TEXT

18. (C) Comment: We leave evaluation of our Iftar Hosts, comments on Iraq to the experts. The press coverage in the Irish Times was totally positive. When taken together with

an article two days later quoting visiting Egyptian FM Ahmed Aboul Gheit to the effect that the U.S. should not pull out of Iraq, the article gave Irish readers a different perspective on Iraq than the one they usually get.

KENNY